



ATTORNEY GENERAL OF TEXAS
GREG ABBOTT

July 23, 2014

Mr. James Kopp
Assistant City Attorney
City of San Antonio
P.O. Box 839966
San Antonio, Texas 78283-3966

OR2014-12756

Dear Mr. Kopp:

You ask whether certain information is subject to required public disclosure under the Public Information Act (the "Act"), chapter 552 of the Government Code. Your request was assigned ID# 535589 (COSA File No. W025922).

The City of San Antonio (the "city") received a request for information related to a specified motor vehicle accident involving the requestor's client and another a named individual. You claim the submitted information is excepted from disclosure under section 552.108 of the Government Code. We have considered the exception you claim and reviewed the submitted information.

Initially, we must address the city's obligations under section 552.301 of the Government Code, which prescribes the procedures a governmental body must follow in asking this office to decide whether requested information is excepted from public disclosure. Section 552.301(b) requires that a governmental body ask for a decision from this office and state the exceptions that apply within ten business days of receiving the written request. Gov't Code § 552.301(b). Section 552.301(e) requires the governmental body to submit to the attorney general, not later than the fifteenth business day after the date of the receipt of the request: (1) written comments stating why the governmental body's claimed exceptions apply to the information that it seeks to withhold; (2) a copy of the written request for information; (3) a signed statement of the date on which the governmental body received the request or evidence sufficient to establish that date; and (4) the specific information that the governmental body seeks to withhold or representative samples if the information is voluminous. *Id.* § 552.301(e)(1).

You state the city received the request for information on March 25, 2014. Therefore, the department's ten- and fifteen-business-day deadlines were April 8, 2014, and April 15, 2014,

respectively. However, you did not request a ruling from this office or submit the information required by section 552.301(e) until June 30, 2014. *See id.* § 552.308 (describing rules for calculating submission dates of documents sent via first class United States mail, common or contract carrier, or interagency mail). Consequently, we find the city failed to comply with the requirements of section 552.301.

Pursuant to section 552.302 of the Government Code, a governmental body's failure to comply with the procedural requirements of section 552.301 results in the legal presumption that the information is public and must be released unless the governmental body demonstrates a compelling reason to withhold the information to overcome this presumption. *Id.* § 552.302; *see also Simmons v. Kuzmich*, 166 S.W.3d 342, 350 (Tex. App.—Fort Worth 2005, no pet.); *Hancock v. State Bd. of Ins.*, 797 S.W.2d 379, 381 (Tex. App.—Austin 1990, no writ). This statutory presumption can generally be overcome when information is confidential by law or third-party interests are at stake. *See Open Records Decision Nos.* 630 at 3 (1994), 325 at 2 (1982).

Although you raise section 552.108 of the Government Code, this section is a discretionary exception to disclosure that protects a governmental body's interests and may be waived. *See Simmons*, 166 S.W.3d at 350 (section 552.108 is not compelling reason to withhold information under section 552.302); *Open Records Decision Nos.* 665 at 2 n.5 (2000) (discretionary exceptions in general), 663 at 5 (1999) (untimely request for decision resulted in waiver of discretionary exceptions), 177 at 3 (1997) (statutory predecessor to section 552.108 subject to waiver). Thus, in failing to comply with section 552.301, the city has waived its argument under section 552.108, and it may not withhold the submitted information on the basis of its own interests under section 552.108. However, the need of a governmental body, other than the one seeking an open records decision, to withhold information under section 552.108 of the Government Code can provide a compelling reason to withhold information from disclosure. *Open Records Decision No.* 586 at 2-3 (1991). You inform us the Bexar County Criminal District Attorney's Office (the "district attorney's office") objects to the release of the requested information. Thus, we will address whether the city may withhold the information at issue on behalf of the district attorney's office under section 552.108.

Section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code excepts from disclosure "[i]nformation held by a law enforcement agency or prosecutor that deals with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime . . . if . . . release of the information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime[.]" Gov't Code § 552.108(a)(1). A government body claiming section 552.108 must reasonably explain how and why the release of the requested information would interfere with law enforcement. *See id.* §§ 552.108(a)(1), .301(e)(1)(A); *see also Ex parte Pruitt*, 551 S.W.2d 706 (Tex. 1977).

You state, and submit correspondence from the district attorney's office representing, the submitted information relates to a pending investigation by the district attorney's office. The district attorney's office objects to the release of the information at issue. Based on the

submitted representations and our review, we find the release of the submitted information would interfere with the detection, investigation, or prosecution of crime. *See Houston Chronicle Publ'g Co. v. City of Houston*, 531 S.W.2d 177 (Tex. Civ. App.—Houston [14th Dist.] 1975) (court delineates law enforcement interests that are present in active cases), *writ ref'd n.r.e. per curiam*, 536 S.W.2d 559 (Tex. 1976).

However, section 552.108 does not except from disclosure “basic information about an arrested person, an arrest, or a crime.” Gov’t Code § 552.108(c). Section 552.108(c) refers to the basic “front-page” information held to be public in *Houston Chronicle*. *See* 531 S.W.2d at 186-187; *see also* Open Records Decision No. 127 (1976) (summarizing types of information considered to be basic information). Accordingly, with the exception of basic information, the city may withhold the submitted information under section 552.108(a)(1) of the Government Code on behalf of the district attorney’s office.

This letter ruling is limited to the particular information at issue in this request and limited to the facts as presented to us; therefore, this ruling must not be relied upon as a previous determination regarding any other information or any other circumstances.

This ruling triggers important deadlines regarding the rights and responsibilities of the governmental body and of the requestor. For more information concerning those rights and responsibilities, please visit our website at http://www.texasattorneygeneral.gov/open/orl_ruling_info.shtml, or call the Office of the Attorney General’s Open Government Hotline, toll free, at (877) 673-6839. Questions concerning the allowable charges for providing public information under the Act may be directed to the Office of the Attorney General, toll free, at (888) 672-6787.

Sincerely,



Cindy Nettles
Assistant Attorney General
Open Records Division

CN/dls

Ref: ID# 535589

Enc. Submitted documents

c: Requestor
(w/o enclosures)